

# Approaching the complex subject-culture articulation<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** From the beginning of psychoanalysis, Freud explained that the subject is inseparable from culture. The subjective experience necessarily implies the reference of the subject to the Other, object of love and hate, and language. In this article, we discuss the contribution of psychoanalysis to the approach of culture, highlighting its specificity, which is that its hypotheses originate from the clinic. From psychoanalysis, we can observe that if the discontent present in culture is unavoidable, due to the constraints that are imposed on drives, psychic illnesses usually critically point to “unhealthy” aspects of culture at certain historical moments.

**Keywords:** psychoanalysis, psychopathology, culture, subjectivity.

A few years after he inaugurated psychoanalysis with the *Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900a/1976, 1900b/1976), a key essay for understanding the writing of the unconscious, Freud writes his first critique of culture in the form of an article entitled “*Civilized Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness*” (Freud, 1908/1977). It may seem to have been a premature jump from the founder of the science of dreams, who was submerged, then, in the task of articulating two of his main concepts: the unconscious and drive. However, a rigorous analysis demonstrates that the theme of the subject’s relationship with culture is central to the first steps of psychoanalysis. In *Project* (Freud, 1950/1977), we find the game that occurs in the emergence of the human under the designation “complex of the neighbor”. This begins in a scene in which the newborn establishes the first and rudimentary social bond with the neighbor (*Nebenmensch*), the first Other to attend its cry for help, a plea to satisfy its thirst and hunger. However, everything would end there if the baby needed the Other only as a suitable instrument to repair a locatable lack in the body. In addition to merely expressing a biological need, the cry will act as an appeal for help and invocation of the maternal presence.

A bond is established between the baby and the one – usually the mother – who takes the place of the Other of language. It gives meaning and names the baby’s pain, it encourages it to judge and recognize the inner excitations that emanate from its own body and to separate itself from the source of external excitations flowing from the outer world. The term with which Freud designates this assistance, indispensable to the advent of the infans as a speaking being, is “foreign help”.

The foreign term refers to the unfamiliar, the unknown, to what is apprehended with horror. However, psychoanalysis reveals a paradox: for the tiny being, the Other is a stranger in a relationship of extreme closeness. The neighbor is at the same time its first object of satisfaction, source of the mythical experience of absolute pleasure, which the child tries to reproduce later, and also its first hostile object: a strange and threatening presence, the only power capable of providing relief, the one who receives and responds affectively to its discomfort, ordering its impulsive manifestations. Ambiguous object, which one wants to rediscover, and at the same time of repulsion, in which one can avoid even thinking about, the Other, in the Freudian perspective, constitutes himself as “the uncanny” (*Unheimlich*).

In short, fertilized by libido and language, sociability begins precisely when then neighbor’s strangeness is perceived. This is the moment when a relation of kinship is born, beyond biology, with someone who is like you – image of the subject’s self –, and, at the same time, the strangest and most alien object within the self: the impossible to metabolize. The child’s helplessness, manifested in the very first cry, which is a demand for presence and not just discharge of tension, “acquires a secondary function of the highest importance, that of *communication*, and the initial helplessness of human beings is the primal source of all *moral motives*” (Freud, 1950/1977, p. 317)<sup>2</sup>. It is the dependence and love to the adult, the fear of losing her love, which underlies acceptance of cultural laws of which the mother is the first spokesperson. However, in this first relationship, for the child, those are only the whims of that powerful figure that are at stake; a residue that cannot be taken in the intricacies of culture.

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The subjective experience necessarily implies the reference of the subject to the Other, object of love (model) and hate (obstacle), and to language. By retaking this “Other” that Freud identified as a hinge between the individual and the collective subject, Lacan introduces the terms Subject and Other, precisely articulating what he termed as the primordial transindividuality of the unconscious: beyond the libidinal marks he receives from his neighbors, the subject is marked, indelibly, by social and political representations of his time. The originality of Lacan’s reading reinforces the truth of the fate Freud had reserved for his heirs: to add the function of critics of the culture they witnessed, to the clinical practice of the one by one. This is so central that it is indispensable to the psychoanalyst’s clinical work.

The first Freudian essay directly concerned with culture, and with its reading of psychoanalysis, is “*Civilized Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness* (1908/1977). A view of the historical-cultural period in which this essay was written, allows us a closer understanding into how Freud weaved his critical analysis of the period, from what he could collect in the clinic about the unconscious in his sexual reality. At the same time, he states that psychoanalysis concerns the subject in its singularity, but because it is linked to language, this singular is part of a greater history.

Under which historical-cultural beacons did Freud formalize the thesis developed in this article? From the late nineteenth century until the arrival of the Nazis in 1938, Vienna was the nexus of questions about modernity, raising the discourse of science to the position of agent of truth. The modernism movement that arose from the strong crisis installed by the new paradigm, was the critical conscience of the modernization process and its results. Among the numerous attempts to rewrite the bases of insertion of the modern subject, psychoanalysis may have been the most faithful of the modernism productions. It is known that Freud decentered man from itself, undermining the illusion of the identity between consciousness and mind and recognizing its fragility. Although he was a philosopher from the Enlightenment, he showed that it is possible to dissipate fixed and complete significations and permit the emergence of new meanings, always lacunar. Thus, it was as such that the inventor of psychoanalysis diverged from many philosophers that based the knowledge of his historical time.

The theme of modern anxiety was the backdrop to artistic-cultural literature in the West in the mid-nineteenth century. The state of the soul of those who actually lived through the effects of the progress of the Enlightenment period was described as “anxious” by arts and philosophy. As the literary critic Jacques Le Rider (1992, p. 68) states in *Viennese modernity and crises of identity*, in the critical philosophical thought of modern decadence created by Nietzsche, especially in *Human, all too human*, the signifiers “modernity” and “nervousness” are used almost as synonyms. For this philosopher, the

burden of culture – the demand it imposes on the individual to know and dominate everything – became a factory of neuroses that mainly affected the cultivating strata of European countries. In general, the literary texts that followed Nietzsche’s work reveal intense perplexity and appeal to the regeneration of humanity lost between the onset of the failure of Enlightenment, and the symptoms produced by progress. Anxiety was an obsessive figure in speeches and literary works.

In the wake of these same criticisms, hypotheses arising in different fields, such as medicine, psychology and psychiatry gained prominence. Wilhelm Erb in his work on contemporary nervousness, Binswanger, in an essay on neurasthenia and progress of American culture, and Krafft-Ebing, based on his own reflections on degeneration, neurosis and neurasthenia, recognized and emphasized modern nervous disease as the effect of “the increased social and economic demands by a greater expenditure of energy, often with quite inadequate opportunity for recovery” (Freud, 1908/1977, p. 185). Parts of these criticisms, as we know, are transcribed into “*Civilized sexual morality and modern nervous illness*. Freud does not discard them completely, although he establishes a fundamental difference in relation to these theories, when he states that the suffering of modern man depended on a fundamental factor – sexuality. With this, in addition to marking a rupture with the hypotheses on the suffering characteristic of the time, the founder of psychoanalysis circumscribes the field and the specificity of his discipline.

Many novelists and psychologists had established the connection between sexual debauchery and nervousness. Freud’s genius, according to Peter Gay (1986, p. 351), was to dare reverse this perspective and assert that primal repression<sup>3</sup> of sexuality – that is, the regulation and codification of sex and the social bond between people – would indeed be the great source of diseases of the soul of modern man. Recognizing that repression of sexuality corresponds to a psychic operation of the subject himself before the demands of culture, he announced one of the destinies of the drive. Later, from the logical development of the theses of the 1908 essay, all constructed exclusively from clinical experience, he appealed to the sorceress (metapsychology) to develop the concept of originary repression. With a lot of “sorcery”, it creates the myth of Totem and taboo, the “scientific myth”, a narrative about the origin of the subject and culture, a metapsychological article that seeks to answer fundamental questions of psychoanalytic investigation. In *Totem and taboo* (Freud, 1913/1976), the author never hid his predilection; he accurately maps the psychoanalytic assumptions about

3 We use the term repression to refer to the norms and imperatives present in the culture that regulate and prohibit the manifestation of sexuality. The term primal repression will be reserved for the psychic operation that prevents access to the consciousness of ideas and impulses that can generate conflicts (*Verdrängung*).

the bases and conditions of civilization: a) suppression of the figure of an excessive and omnipotent power, the bearer of absolute joy; b) obedience to laws that ensure language and social bonds (Fuks, 2003, p. 28).

In the historical context of Freud's work, the idea that the repression of sexuality produced modern nervousness was dependent on the concept of drive inaugurated in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905/1976), although Freud had already used the word *Trieb* previously<sup>4</sup>. In 1905, devoid of any moralism or ideological trait, Freud postulated that partial drives correspond to a force which, in man, is incessant. They are qualified not only as partial, but as polymorphic and perverse. Taking the word perversion to conceptualize infantile sexuality, Freud entirely separates it from the presuppositions in which this notion rested at that time.

In the XIX century, the signifier perversion encompassed the ideas of abnormal sexuality and moral defect, ideas that gained scientific legitimacy and conceptual consistency in legal medicine. Normal sexuality, of which perversion would be a deviation, is the one that is useful for the conservation of the species, within an evolutionary ideology. In characterizing children sexuality as polymorphous and perverse, Freud subverts this notion, since the term perversion no longer designates an anomaly or deviation from the norm, but normal child sexuality. "Perversion" is taken as part of the constitution of the human subject, which means that the notion of instinct is abandoned. In psychoanalysis, the sexual drive, in its indeterminacy, extreme plasticity and "maladaptation", represents the complete departure from the paradigm of instinct. Unlike instinct, drive does not have a natural object to adapt to. Although enigmatic, ambiguously defined and interpreted in many discordant and some reductionist ways at that time, the drive theory is a major innovation in the notion of hegemonic sexuality. In conceptualizing sexuality in an unprecedented way and representing it through the destinies of the drive, Freud subscribed to the thesis that human sexuality is structurally denaturalized.

Drives cannot be reduced to biology. They are constituted by support in the satisfaction of needs and are, therefore, traces and residues of the experiences with the maternal Other that have caused pleasure and that one wishes to always revive. They are the foundation and the correlate of the early social ties and the raw material used by Eros, in his quest to combine individuals, families, peoples, into one unit, since "civilization is a process in the service of Eros" (Freud, 1930/1976, p. 106). In this sense, the drive was an important conceptual tool used by Freud in his movement to invalidate the difference

between individual and collective psychology, taking man as a being of culture, as well as deconstructing the continuity between human and animal psychology, which was the basis of many theories and reflections of the field of psychology.

In "*Civilized*" *sexual morality and modern nervous illness*, the author, at first impregnated with the same preoccupations as his contemporaries, examines how the historical barriers imposed by the civilizing movement on sexuality (the part of the drives which is regulated by language and therefore, obeys the law of incest) cause the subject's illness. In this regard, a transcription from one of his patients, submerged by the moral dictates of the time, will not go unnoticed to the reader: "In our family we've all become neurotic because we wanted to be something better than what, with our origin, we are capable of being" (Freud, 1908/1977, p. 164). A requirement of modern culture? It seems so, according to data from W. Erb's research. Although these predisposing factors to neurosis may or may not have this effect, Freud says:

The demands made on the efficiency of the individual in the struggle for existence have greatly increased. . . . At the same time the individual's needs and his demands for the enjoyments of life have increased in all classes; unprecedented luxury has spread to strata of the population who were formerly quite untouched by it. (Freud, 1908/1977, pp. 164-165)

The astonishing thing is that an essay written over a century ago gives us the impression of it being a commentary on the impasses of our time. Modernity: excessive enjoyment, luxury, irreligion, noisy music, new media, haste, agitation, etc. The literature on the modernity of Freud's Vienna shows that it has in many ways advanced our postmodernity. Among these, however, the civilized sexual morality of his time, which Freud criticized severely as the main responsible factor for the neuroses he found in his clinic, is not included. Some authors, for this reason, accuse him of yielding to utopia by believing that if morality would be less rigid, men would be happier. They consider that only later, when writing *Civilization and its discontents* (1930/1976), Freud admitted that evil is irreducible, since culture rests necessarily on the suppression of sexual and destructive tendencies. This is, nevertheless, a hasty reading of *Sexual Morality*, since the complexity of the argument developed in the essay does not validate hope in having any *happy ending*.

A more careful reading of the 1908 essay already indicates that the analysis of psychic suffering cannot be based on the concept of a simple opposition between culture and sexuality. Aporia permeates the text. If, on the one hand, culture demands the repression of sexuality for its benefit, on the other, this does not prevent repression

4 Before 1905, the term is sometimes mentioned in Freud's correspondence with Fliess. Then, in 1895, it is mentioned in the *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, in *Studies on Hysteria*, 1895, in a paragraph of the article *Sexuality in the Etiology of Neuroses*, 1898, and once in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, in 1900. However, it only takes a conceptual value in 1905.

from robbing precious contributions from culture. Freud notes, for example, that since women were educated to not indulge in their curiosity on sexual matters; often the repression of curiosity over sex did not obtain its effects without resulting in a general inhibition of thought. Thus, the said (at the time) intellectual inferiority of women would be a consequence of this state of affairs. Likewise, Freud remarks that a man who represses his inclinations to harshness and cruelty, becoming kind as compensation, is likely to do much less for others because of this inhibition than if he had not repressed hostility.

All of these considerations led Freud to insist that neuroses always succeed in thwarting the purposes of culture and that they effectively do the work of the repressed mental forces that are hostile to culture:

The asocial nature of neuroses has its genetic origin in their most fundamental purpose, which is to take flight from an unsatisfying reality into a more pleasurable world of phantasy. The real world, which is avoided in this way by neurotics, is under the sway of human society and of the institutions collectively created by it. To turn away from reality is at the same time to withdraw from the community of men. (Freud, 1913/1976, p. 74)

Therefore, the symptom must also be considered as an act of protest against the action of civilizational coercion. The warlike and disciplinary metaphors used by Freud to clarify the mechanism of neurosis – defense, resistance, restraint, repression, censorship, etc. – reveal the tension that the psychoanalyst sees as permanent between the subject and the Other in culture. Hysterical attacks and other symptomatic oddities of hysteria, whose logic remained incomprehensible until the advent of the *talking cure*, appear in *Studies on Hysteria* (Freud, 1893/1976) as an objection to the excessive control of the Other. The *Studies* are a treatise on the effects of the policy of nineteenth-century sexual repression on women, in which psychoanalysis is presented to the reader as a field of knowledge, an asset of culture, that encourages the return of the passions to the social scene.

Valuing culture, not only in its role of imposing repression on the drives, but as terrain where these can be exercised, Freud takes the mechanism of inhibition without hesitation as the dividing line between neurosis and normality. Inhibition is not only a consequence of the loss of energy which in every neurosis has to be permanently employed to the maintenance of repression. The first movement in neurosis is a departure from reality by the introversion of the libido (Freud, 1924/1976), and this departure underlies all neurotic symptomatology. The term introversion, forged by Jung, is reinterpreted by Freud and goes on to designate the withdrawal of libidinal investment from objects of everyday reality and its use for the investment of imaginary objects. Introversion is a counterpart of

repression, which is produced by the self under the influence of the conflict between drives and reality.

The consequence is that the imaginary objects are invested and the libido is, in part, restricted to the world of fantasy. From then on, satisfaction will be predominantly imaginary, and the search for satisfaction in reality will be relegated to the background. This form of imaginary satisfaction of the drive is the other face of the inhibition of the act. The self will try to prevent the substitutive satisfaction of the repressed drive from having any effect on reality. The neurotic symptom, as a substitutive drive satisfaction, lowers the drive satisfactions to the imaginary plane, by avoiding the act. There is another destiny for the drive, alternative to repression: the sublimation that puts a huge load of energy at the disposal of work in favor of the culture.

The sexual drive, which is inhibited and hardly satisfied in the neurosis, where its satisfaction is only imaginary, can effectively find satisfaction in sublimation. Unlike repression, sublimation incites the subject to overcome narcissism, to disobey the commands of the superego. It is a way of conquering eroticism through aesthetic and ethical elevation:

The man who, in consequence of his unyielding constitution, cannot fall in with this suppression of instinct, drive suppression, becomes a “criminal”, an “outlaw”, in the face of society – unless his social position or his exceptional capacities enable him to impose himself upon it as a great man, a “hero”. (Freud, 1908/1977, p. 187)

Heroes, creators and artists are those who, in some way, put drives activity at the service of their work. The creative work always involves a transgression, finding new ways, different from the *status quo*. In *Civilization and its discontents*, returning to the theme of sublimation, Freud (1930/1976) shows how artistic creation contributes to reducing the power of social repression over the drives. The impact of certain plastic works of art on civilization, with its possible subversive value, testifies to the vigor of the effects of sublimation on social life.

Desire’s path to realization present in fantasies and neurotic symptoms, the imaginary satisfaction is considered by Lacan (1975/1982) as a paradoxical “satisfaction”, since imaginary objects are not well-suited to drive satisfaction. Imaginary satisfactions, by avoiding the risks of displeasure, are insufficient from the point of view of enjoyment (Bekerman, 1990, p. 77). It is in the act that the drive can find its satisfaction.

The area of the drive is that of the act. For this reason, drive is defined by Freud (1915/1976) as a piece of activity, an idea adopted by Lacan (1986/1988), when he locates the essence of the drive in the stroke of the act. Exposure to anxiety is the counterpart of not inhibiting the act, not avoiding drive satisfaction. Freud did not systematically develop the notion of sublimation,

or perhaps he did so in a lost essay of the *Papers on metapsychology*. However, he referred to sublimation in a way that leaves no doubt about the role of fundamental importance that it plays in psychoanalysis.

Sublimation is a direct consequence of the extreme plasticity of the drive, of the perverse polymorphism Freud used to characterize human sexuality, unlike the “type” sexuality of other animal species, whose repertoire is quite predictable and well suited to its natural object. On the contrary, the object is the most contingent element of the drive. That is why it can be transmuted, turning to targets and objects that seem to have no more sexual aspects and represent something of value to culture. Freud left us with the clear indication in *Instincts and their vicissitudes* (Freud, 1915/1976) that it is an independent vicissitude of drives different from repression; this allows us to conclude that their effects are not symptomatic, they do not share the structure of compromise formation with neurotic symptoms, nor constitute a deformed or coded satisfaction, unknown to the subject, and which remains predominantly on the imaginary plane. Sublimation occupies a particular place in supporting narcissism because it involves the use of the drive demands for the benefit of the *spiritual progress* in culture (Freud, 1939/2013).

Drives and sublimation were objects of detailed reflection in “*Civilized*” *sexual morality* and, in fact, some of those formulations anticipated and prepared the emergence, years later, of the thesis of *Civilization and its discontents*. In this second great Freudian paper on culture, already in the second topic, the solidarity between sexuality and culture is emphasized, since sexuality, love and all social bonds are subsumed into the life drives (Eros). Moreover, the fundamental conflict is no longer located in the clash between culture and sexuality, but in the struggle between life and death drives, that is, Eros and Thanatos: “As we already know, the problem that lies ahead is knowing how to get rid of the greatest obstacle to civilization, that is, the constitutive inclination of human beings to mutual aggression” (Freud, 1930/1976, pp. 137-138).

It is a new era where the issue posed to the psychoanalyst is no longer centered on sexuality, but results from the impact of the First World War, with the revelation that even in countries that had achieved the highest level of cultural achievement, violence and barbarity could emerge in its most brutal face. The traumatic neuroses of war come to denounce this destructiveness. However, this does not mean that repression of sexuality has ceased to be considered as a potential determinant for neurotic illness. On the contrary, in 1930 Freud reaffirmed the thesis that the sexual life of the educated man was severely impaired by the demands of modern life.

As it is common in Freudian work, new elaborations do not mean abandoning old ones, but simply their inclusion in a new theoretical configuration, which obviously qualifies them in a new way. There is

a permanent tension between the two topics. If the first question that called Freud to examine culture was the production of hysterics as a denunciation of the very repressive civilized sexual morality, especially in relation to women, in 1930 the pathologies resulting from the violence of World War I, instigated the psychoanalyst to reflect on destructiveness, and on the third source of discontent in culture: the relation of man to the Other. Although assuming the most different shades over time, both issues still haunt us these days.

Psychoanalysts are nowadays very concerned with all the changes in the social-political and technological conditions of our time, since patients who arrive at their offices are not the same of more than a century ago. Efforts to account for the changing cultural reality are more than legitimate and are truly indispensable to the vitality of the psychoanalytic field.

Many wonder whether psychoanalysis would still have a place in this era of “everything is allowed”, in which the morality of capitalism is to buy and enjoy everything, and then discard it. The discouragement with psychoanalysis’s future prospects sometimes reaches the point that, instead of situating psychoanalysis nowadays, some commentators deny it any place in our time (Melman, 2002).

Attempts to “diagnose” the contemporary subject by psychoanalysts, that is, the use of clinical pictures to characterize it, are debatable. In diagnosing this subject, whether as perverse, melancholic or *borderline*, what is achieved is to completely eliminate the idea of singularity in the name of an average subject who would represent society. The appropriateness of this procedure is questioned even in sociology. Society is made up of laws that govern relations between people. A “collective mentality” or “collective organism” (Elias, 1939/1994, p. 24) is then created to support social regularities. The “contemporary subject” represents an instance of this tendency. It is also a construction that serves to support the regularities of social relations, giving them substance (Rudge, 2006).

There is open opposition between the proposition of an average subject representative of a culture or era, and the point of view of psychoanalysis that turns to subjects “one by one”. One cannot disregard the fact that the myriad differences that we can observe between values and ways of living are not only distributed among different cultures; within the same culture, we inherit many traditions that may be incompatible and we do very conflicting things (Eagleton, 1998, p. 87). There is always a contradiction between the particularity of experiences that are restricted to certain individuals or groups, with the universalization of other experiences that are expressed culturally by means of sets of symbols that make them homogeneous (Velho, 1987, p. 18).

Despite the need to respect the boundaries between the various fields of knowledge and the complexity of an interdisciplinary study, the concern to articulate what we

find in the clinic to our cultural environment is legitimate and fundamental. The symptoms and complaints found in clinical practice should be effectively considered as inseparable from the historical context and from current and dated social norms. A compass for the analyst who wants to follow Freud's example is, by peering at the human soul in his clinic, letting himself be sensitized by the emerging problems of the time. Taking into account the historical dimension, socio-cultural diversity and keeping faithful to the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis, it is possible to produce a critical reading of our time. Lacan, in his teaching, had already warned us that the analyst should renounce his exercise of psychoanalysis if he "cannot attain on the horizon the subjectivity of his time" (Lacan, 1953/1998, p. 322).

Since the sexual revolution of the 1960s and the advent of the contraceptive pill, repression of women has receded in the West. Family organization has undergone major changes, information flows swiftly, while innovations resulting from technological advances are impressive. New questions about sexuality prevail in the contemporary world, and with this, the demand for listening to what was not even suggested in Freud's time, such as transsexuality, is born. Analysts cannot escape the need to evaluate each clinical case, re-reading metapsychology in terms of what is heard in the clinic of our time. This is where we must interrogate psychoanalytic theory along the lines of Freud, who has reviewed it countless times. Psychoanalysis, as its creator observes, is "always unfinished, ready to displace the emphases of its theories or to modify them" (Freud, 1923/1976, p. 249).

In the name of interdisciplinary studies between sociology and psychoanalysis, the sociologist Ehrenberg (2000, 2004) tends to discard a few formulations of Freudian theory. He considers that the cult to performance and the valorization of autonomy, central values of the present society, share responsibility in causing depression, the foremost symptom of discontent of our time. In a society where autonomy and self-fulfillment are such valued qualities, the fear of not being up to what is expected becomes constant. Depression would be a way of responding to these new problems and, for the author, would have replaced neurosis.

*La fatigue d'être soi* is a case study in which I tried to show that, from neurosis to depression, we move from a pathology of conflict – that puts desire into the picture – into a pathology of insufficiency – that brings into play the question of action. (Ehrenberg, 2004, p. 50)

Depression, which statistics today suggest to be a growing problem, may have this dimension of pathology of insufficiency, but from the point of view of psychoanalysis the psychic conflict that is permanent and irreducible is not ignored. It involves a dimension of denunciation and contestation to the situation created by the economic expansion of capitalism that relies on consumers without

hesitation, always ready for the quick search of the last objects and fashion insignia, avid and addicted to objects. That is, the subject is called to the role of consumer within market, which do not take this subject into consideration. The production of pseudo-needs that mask the lack is enforced, and the production of new objects is offered as an immediate solution. Depression involves a refusal and rebellion against the stimulus to consumption and to overvaluation of the possession of the objects as signs of success and of power and, ultimately, to the objectification of the subject.

One of the most impregnable bastions of the protest of neurosis, that gain increasing expression in the 21st century, are the so-called pathologies of the body, of which anorexia is the flagship. This pathology is considered by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) as an autonomous disorder. Freud treated it as a symptom, which eventually was present in hysteria, but which appeared especially as one of the main symptoms of melancholy, which include inhibition, depression, self-accusations, insomnia, and delusional expectation of punishment. The elaborations on melancholy formalized in 1917 pointed to object loss, ambivalence and narcissistic identification with the lost object as central factors in this clinical picture.

Starting from the conceptual distinction between need, demand and desire, Jacques Lacan extended the scope of the psychoanalytic clinic in relation to the treatment of anorexia and bulimia, opening a new path for its understanding. In *The direction of treatment and the principles of its power*, he emphasizes that the mother of the anorexic person, in consonance with the buoyancy of consumption, "fills her up with porridge, that is, confusing her care with the gift of her love" (Lacan, 1958/1988, p. 634). What is left for the child is to refuse food. In the personal history of anorexic patients, the maternal Other presents itself without leaving room for the place of lack to be created. She responds rapidly to demands as needs, without providing the necessary space for desire to appear. In a movement of opposition, the child, refusing to satisfy the mother's demand for her to eat, demands that she desires something else, because that is what is lacking in the child's path toward desire.

The term *eat nothing* is well known (Lacan, 1994/1995, p. 188) to designate the act that denounces the anorexic's need for something to be lacking and thus to reduce the omnipotence of the Other. Massimo Recalcati (2003), in *Clinica del vacío, anorexias, dependencias, psicosis*, returns to this subject that was inaugurated by the master of Paris and insists that the choice of the anorexic of eating nothing can make this nothing the separating object of the Other. Through nothingness – of eating nothing – the anorexic opens a hole in the Other. The nothing appears in Lacan's work as a shield and support of desire; to elect nothingness constitutes a subjective defense that safeguards desire, operating a pseudo separation between the subject and the Other. However, as the Italian analyst observes, the separation is "as if", because the anorexic is consumed as pure

activity of denial, in an unilateral opposition to the Other. Thus, the subject does not take into account the symbolic dependence on the Other, and therefore the radicalization of the anorexic election implies an “absolute passion for freedom to the detriment of the bond imposed by the signifier” (Recalcati, 2003, p. 23).

There are two types of “nothing” features that may be present in anorexia. While nothingness in neurosis is an attempt to affirm desire, the second nothing refers to a mode of asexual jouissance, unrelated to phallus and castration. It is a frozen nothingness, non dialogic, which expresses precisely a refusal to the Other’s alterity. The tendency to act out in these cases requires a great deal of caution from the analyst who is running the risk of witnessing a victory of the death drive over Eros. From these two versions of anorexia – the first aiming a separation from the Other to affirm one’s own desire, and the second as a death wish – we can discern in these tendencies to act out, always present in this last form, the deadly imperatives of the superego. Thus, anorexia is situated in a position opposed to that of the capitalist discourse. She says no to the asphyxiating feeding offered to her by a mother who, from the perspective of the capitalist discourse – manifests herself as “the unlimited availability of objects guaranteed by the globalization of the market” (Recalcati, 2004, p. 251).

We keep finding hysterics, obsessive neuroses and traumatic neuroses in our clinic. Patients keep challenging analysts to listen to their hesitations about sex itself. They insist on addressing their obsessive questions about desire and, increasingly, the subjects beset by social traumas seek in psychoanalysis a place to witness the unspeakable pain of the wounded soul.

Let us return to this escalation of challenges that we face in the day-to-day clinical practice of the 21st century. A symptom is an unconscious way of refusing to adapt to a form of social repression, which allows us to consider pathology, after all, as a revolutionary force (Israël 1994, pp. 119-120). Hence Freud, in addition to considering conflict as inherent in the civilizing process, considers discontent in culture as irrevocable. The opposition to cultural impositions is guaranteed by the drive, this ungovernable object, discovered by poets and elevated by psychoanalysis to the dignity of science (Braunstein, 2011). However, the psychoanalyst has always believed in the possibility that, instead of resorting to a withdrawal from reality – whether through the libido’s introversion in neurosis, or to refusal of reality and construction of a fantasy world in psychosis – this discontent may lead to what Freud called alloplastic modifications. That is, work and drive satisfaction through the creation, in search for transformation of aspects of the culture that cause suffering.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that neurotic or psychotic symptoms have a potential of social criticism that can only find fertile ground to exert its effects if there are those who are willing to listen. It was what Freud did with the hysterics, who denounced their sexual dissatisfaction through their symptoms; with Schreber, the writer of the minutiae of his delirium in which the references to the rigor and sadism that presided over his creation by his father surfaced, a sadism that brought traces of the cruel morality of pre-Nazi Germany; and the neurotics of war who expressed, in their motor disturbances and crises of distress, their despair and refusal to the brutality of war.

### **Em torno da complexa articulação sujeito e cultura**

**Resumo:** Freud explicitou, desde o início da psicanálise, que o sujeito é inseparável da cultura. A experiência subjetiva implica, necessariamente, a referência do sujeito ao Outro, objeto de amor e de ódio, e à linguagem. Neste artigo, buscamos abordar a contribuição da psicanálise à abordagem da cultura, ressaltando sua especificidade, que é a de que suas hipóteses têm origem na clínica. A partir da psicanálise, podemos observar que, se o mal-estar na cultura, devido às restrições que são impostas às pulsões, é inevitável, os adoecimentos psíquicos costumam apontar criticamente para aspectos “insalubres” da cultura em determinados momentos históricos.

**Palavras-chave:** psicanálise, psicopatologia, cultura, subjetividade.

### **Autour du complexe articulation sujet et culture**

**Résumé :** Freud a expliqué, depuis le début de la psychanalyse, que le sujet est inséparable de la culture. L’expérience subjective implique nécessairement la référence du sujet à un autre, objet de l’amour et la haine, et le langage. Dans cet article, nous abordons la contribution de la psychanalyse à l’étude de la culture, mettant l’accent sur sa spécificité, qui est que ses hypothèses proviennent de la clinique. De la psychanalyse on voit que, si le malaise dans la culture, en raison des restrictions imposées aux pulsions, est inévitable, les maladies psychiques servent souvent à identifier critiqueusement les aspects « malsains » de la culture dans certains moments historiques.

**Mots-clés :** psychanalyse, psychopathologie, culture, subjectivité.

## Alrededor de la compleja articulación sujeto y cultura

**Resumen:** Freud explicitó, desde el inicio del psicoanálisis, que el sujeto es inseparable de la cultura. La experiencia subjetiva implica necesariamente la referencia del sujeto al otro, objeto del amor y odio, y al lenguaje. En este artículo, buscamos abordar la contribución del psicoanálisis al enfoque de la cultura, resaltando su especificidad, que es la de que sus hipótesis tienen origen en la clínica. A partir del psicoanálisis, podemos observar que, si el malestar en la cultura, debido a las restricciones impuestas a las pulsiones, es inevitable, las enfermedades psíquicas suelen señalar críticamente aspectos «insalubres» de la cultura en determinados momentos históricos.

**Palabras claves:** psicoanálisis, psicopatología, cultura, subjetividad.

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